

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Serious Violence](#), HC 1016

Tuesday 2 April 2019

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 2 April 2019.

Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Douglas Ross; John Woodcock.

Questions 331-390

Witnesses

Oral evidence taken in private

I: Dr Suchitra Bhandari, Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Head of Psychology and Psychological Therapies, Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust; Dr Lucy Gore, Clinical Psychologist and Deputy Project Lead, Project Future; and Dr Hannah Stringer, Clinical Psychologist, Project Future.

II: SC, Community Consultant, Project Future; RN, Community Consultant, Project Future; Dr Suchitra Bhandari; Dr Lucy Gore; and Dr Hannah Stringer.

Note: This evidence has been redacted by the Committee. "[***]" represents redacted text.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- Project Future ([SVC0032](#))

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Suchitra Bhandari, Dr Lucy Gore and Dr Hannah Stringer.

Q331 **Chair:** Thank you very much for joining us and for facilitating the discussion today. Do you want to give us a bit of a briefing, in terms of what the organisation does, and tell us a bit about the young people who are coming, what they are expecting, and what you think will be the best process? You will obviously have seen the nature of the inquiry we are doing into serious violence. We are very keen to hear from young people about what they see as the biggest difficulties and how it feels from their perspective, so thank you so much for helping us to do that. Introduce yourselves as well, and say what each of you do, and tell us a bit about the organisation first; then we will get into you telling us about the young people.

Dr Bhandari: If we do introductions first, I can then give you an overview of the service. I am Suchi Bhandari, a Consultant Clinical Psychologist and the Head of Psychological Therapies for Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust. I launched and developed with partners Project Future nearly five years ago.

Dr Gore: I am Dr Lucy Gore. I am also a clinical psychologist, and I am deputy leader of Project Future. I have been working at Project Future for about four and half years. I was part of the original clinical team that did the ground work, met the young people and brought the project up from the ground.

Dr Stringer: I am Dr Hannah Stringer, another clinical psychologist at Project Future. I have been with the team for just over two years.

Dr Bhandari: Project Future, is a holistic mental health and wellbeing service. We have engaged in excess of 300 really hard-to-reach young people in one of the most deprived wards in the country—in Haringey[***]. These young people are usually described as socially excluded, gang-affiliated and involved in serious youth violence. We work with young people between the ages of 11 and 25, but we do take some of the older ones over 25 as well.

Our approach is to provide a psychologically underpinned, holistic mental health and wellbeing service, where we wrap mental health interventions around all the activities that we do in the project. We are tasked with four main objectives. We obviously provide mental health and mental wellbeing; we also deliver on employment, education and training, and address stability needs. We know that young people who are involved in crime are three times more likely to have unmet mental health needs, so if we address all of these needs, we are bound to reduce offending – fourth objective, which is what our project has shown. I can give you some of the reports that really hit the targets, in terms of our objectives and the findings from our report.



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We also provide a co-production-based approach, where we position our young people as experts in their own lives. What we don't do in the project is play out their dominant narratives—in how society describes them: as aggressive, violent and dangerous young people. We don't mention such labels in the project. We use a strengths-based approach in the project. We actually draw out their subjugative narrative, which is that these are resourceful young men with talent. You will see from the report the amazing work that these young people have done, including films, art exhibitions, art installations, cooking and bridging out into employment.

We have found that young people who are engaged in productive and meaningful activities, keeping them off the streets will lead to reduced police arrests, accident and emergency admissions and criminal justice system/prison interventions, which are very costly services. We therefore have created financial savings and efficiencies in the NHS/statutory sector and the charity/voluntary sectors. We work across the whole system, because in our view the system has failed these young people.

We work very hard to put the system right for these young people, by working across the whole partnership and across organisational boundaries. We navigate care for these young people across the organisations. Our young people have unmet mental health needs and ruptured relationships to help seeking, so through the project we repair their relationship to help seeking.

That is our service in a nutshell. Our formal partnership is between Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust, Haringey Council and MIND in Haringey, but we also work across the whole criminal justice system. We also have a strategic partnership with the Metropolitan police at the steering board level. Is that enough of an overview? Do ask us questions.

Q332 Chair: Thank you. In terms of the young people who are coming today, is there anything that you would tell us about them, or anything that we should be aware of before we start?

Dr Bhandari: I think any direct questions related to their offending or their personal lives—I would say that you would just get them very stuck on those. However, they are happy to share experiences of peers, community, etc. And if they come up with it, that's fine; they'll tell you how they have turned their lives around.

Also, we keep the project address under the radar, because of reprisals, including gang reprisals and gang retaliations, so we don't really give out the address. We are fine to say that it's in Haringey [***].

I think that something around the inequalities would be quite a good perspective. But I think apart from those two aspects—is there anything else?

Dr Gore: No. They can share with you their experiences of Project Future, because both of them have been quite involved in getting individual support from the project, and in the social action work we do as a project.



I guess our ethos at Project Future is to recognise that things like serious youth violence and knife crime emerge due to social deprivation, and health and social inequality. Being a young man growing up in [***] — your initial chances and the options available to you are really reduced, and becoming involved in a life of crime is normalised. What we have seen in the project is intergenerational patterns repeated time after time.

As a project, we try to position young people not as the problem, but as holding the solutions; the problems exist in the environment and the systems that surround and interact with the young people. That is on multiple levels, from schools up to policing and the health services. The young people we have engaged over the last four years seldom access any services. They don't even go to GPs. A lot of young people we work with have quite chronic health issues. If you are a victim of violent crime, of course, that can lead to quite complex physical health issues that further impact your mental health, and they really don't access the services at all. You are talking about a group of young men who are really kind of off-radar.

Q333 Stuart C. McDonald: Why is that? Why won't young people access their GP or other health services?

Dr Bhandari: It is important to understand social determinants for our young people - from a very young age a child, who is naughty, who may have sub-threshold to acute mental health issues, growing up in very overcrowded environments, probably with a single parent, or where the mother is too busy; possibly sort of unsupervised kids, who start to play up. Once they are labelled naughty and as a problem and likely to get excluded and referred to pupil referral units. Once you are in that kind of space, it is very easy for one to get excluded and for the school to not react.

From a very young age, if they are excluded. What do they do once they are excluded? They hang about and get up to all sorts. They are hanging about with what we refer to as gangs, but they are just with their peers, and these are in very deprived areas are really very threat-based environments, so they end up carrying knives for their protection. Then, of course, they get exploited in terms of county lines and so on.

Young people get exploited. They don't engage in mainstream, statutory services because they have very, very difficult experiences. They are very mistrustful of statutory services. Most of our young people don't have passports or driving licences. They don't access benefits. We help them with their stability needs. One of our main objectives is to address these needs including driving licences, passports etc.

Dr Gore: The exploitation thing is interesting in itself, because of course in a community like the one we work in, exploitation is part of the culture. You will see that for the older young men whom we engage, who might be seen as more exploitative of young people, that is seen as part and parcel of life in the area. It will have happened to them, and therefore it is



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happening again. To really tackle the issue from our perspective, we have seen that you need interventions at multiple levels.

We have recently started working in a youth centre. We got some funding from Comic Relief to pilot an intervention in youth centres, in which we are going to embed two psychologists in the youth centre to co-produce an intervention with the youth club. It will be very peer-led and community-led, but we will be offering our mental health expertise alongside the community expertise. The idea is to see how the model that we have created over the last four years will be adapted into more early intervention services. It will be trying to get to the issue slightly earlier. But we have always said that simultaneously you do need the work with older men who are equally involved in the cycle.

Q334 **Tim Loughton:** You are all clinical psychologists.

Dr Gore: Yes.

Q335 **Tim Loughton:** You talk about environmental impacts on these kids. Is there evidence of attachment dysfunction? Are there similarities here?

Dr Gore: Yes.

Dr Bhandari: Absolutely. One of our primary evidence-based psychological theories we use is attachment theory. We use community psychology and narrative therapy as well—really well spotted! Attachment is one of our primary underlying principles, in terms of engagement and access.

When we set up the project five years ago, we set it up with a lot of intelligence from community safety, the council, public health and the NHS, but we lacked young people accessing this service. We used relational security and peer referral system, based on attachment, for engagement. We found access and engagement crucial for these very hard-to-reach young people. Attachment theory is one of the primary theories that we use.

Q336 **Tim Loughton:** But you are seeing them when it is all too late, because it is about the first 1,001 days.

Dr Stringer: A lot of those relationships are helping us to see what things can be improved upon. The fact that more than 300 young people felt able to access something is a sign of that.

Dr Gore: Emerging evidence on attachment theory would argue that adolescence is a time when you can still intervene.

Tim Loughton: A second chance.

Dr Gore: Yes. The old view used to be about early experiences, but now there is a whole swathe of adolescence-based mentalisation interventions that have shown you can support young people to understand people's minds, and their own minds, better. There is emotional dysregulation, too. A lot of the young men really struggle. I have been so surprised by the



level of emotional literacy in the project. Some young men I have worked with can really struggle to label what is going on in their bodies and minds. They have no emotional language to describe it. A lot of it is, "I am angry", but when you get under the surface, there is so much more going on.

Dr Bhandari: And trauma.

Dr Gore: So much trauma and anxiety. It presents as anger, but they do not have a name for it. A lot of the work we have done is about supporting young men to understand what is going on.

Dr Stringer: I guess what we have been keen to do is move a little away from traditional mental health labels, and think about mental health in a holistic way in terms of emotional wellbeing, which everyone has. If you are in a context of constant threat and trauma around you, that will inevitably have an impact on your wellbeing.

Dr Gore: But of course, as Suchi has said, that engagement process takes a long time. There is no short-term intervention that we have discovered for them.

Dr Bhandari: Most of our young people have taken at least seven months to a year to engage, because they initially thought that we were police informants. As you can imagine, they have very ruptured relationships with the police. The police have an equally difficult job, but the policing at present—I think can be very reactive; they have reached a crisis where there are lots of stabbings, policing can therefore become quite criminalising and pathologising. What we do in Project Future is position our young people as experts. We co-produce every aspect of the project. We tell our young people, "This is your space. If something goes wrong here, we will shut this place down." They really own the space – both psychologically and physically own the space. They lead on all the activities in the project.

Dr Gore: What you find with the engagement is that it can take a year or longer, but once people do engage, you quite quickly see the gains from our perspective. The engagement process is very heavily informed by evidence-based psychological approaches, using attachment-based approaches, narrative therapy and an overarching framework of community psychology. We are founded on mental health evidence-based intervention, which is what we feel has enabled us to see much more effective change.

Dr Bhandari: And it makes us quite different from a bog-standard youth service. It is the psychological underpinning that makes it different.

Q337 **Stuart C. McDonald:** How do young people come within the ambit of Project Future?

Dr Stringer: The only way that young people access us is through peer referral. Young people bring their friends, and that has enabled improved trust and relationships within the project.



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Dr Gore: We do a lot of work to spread the approach more widely across Haringey. We do a lot of work disseminating the approach with other community services and other statutory services. In fact, there is the new liaison and diversion service—

Dr Bhandari: We have just been commissioned for liaison and diversion services based on this model which will hopefully have impact pan-London. Going back to peer referrals, what we do is quite unique. We do not take statutory referrals, because it is too risky for our young people; you do not know who you are getting, and which gang they might be affiliated with. Of course we intervene at individual and peer level, and it is fine to provide intervention to a young person, but then they go back to their peers and their community, and they possibly will start to reoffend, so our interventions are at peer and community level, and we will include their families if need be.

Chair: Can I interrupt you? I am conscious that we are keeping them waiting; we have already kept them waiting about 10 minutes longer than we said we would. We had probably better bring them in, and if there are any follow-up questions or things that you think we should know, then do let us know.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: SC, RN, Dr Bhandari, Dr Gore and Dr Stringer.

Chair: I am Yvette Cooper. I am the Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee. We are a cross-party Committee and do lots of different kinds of reports and inquiries. Perhaps we can go round the table.

Tim Loughton: Hi, I am Tim Loughton. I am a Conservative MP. I represent Worthing and Shoreham, down on the south coast. I think I have been on this Committee longer than anybody else. I have been round the block quite a bit. Some years ago, I used to be the Minister for children and young people, so I was quite involved with youth services stuff and things like that, where I know there are big problems these days.

Stuart C. McDonald: My name is Stuart McDonald. I am the Member of Parliament for a place called Cumbernauld, which is just outside Glasgow up in Scotland. I was elected in 2015—it was longer ago than I would like to think, but then a lot has happened. I have been on this Committee since 2015, so not quite as long as Tim.

Douglas Ross: I am Douglas Ross. I represent a place called Moray in the north of Scotland, even further north than Stuart's constituency, near Inverness. I was only elected in 2017, just under two years ago, and I have been a member of the Committee since then. I think I am the youngest member of the Committee.



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John Woodcock: I am John Woodcock. I am an independent MP now, as I fell out with my former party. I represent a town called Barrow-in-Furness in the north-west of England.

[Clerks' introductions]

Chair: We are going to see the film.

Film is shown.

Q338 **Chair:** Thank you. That is a really powerful film, and a good summary of the challenges. Can you say something about the stuff you are doing with Project Future now, and what you think is helpful or valuable about it?

SC: I started being a researcher for a project—researching things online. That project has been achieved in the community. It was qualitative research, and I was also a community consultant. I displayed the research in the House of Lords.

Q339 **Chair:** And what kinds of things are you researching?

SC: How the project has made a change to the community, and how young people doing that project are reacting to it—do they like it or not, and why do they like it? It was things like that, as well as what has been beneficial.

Q340 **Chair:** [***], what about you?

RN: I started engaging with the project in 2015 when I came out of prison. One of my friends was working on the project, and he told me to come and to see what it was like. I went there and I met Lucy and other staff members. I told them what I wanted to do, and slowly I started going there daily and putting ideas together. I am passionate about my area. [***]'s me, and I want to see change. I have seen good days and bad days. I am not long out of prison, and I have seen that things have got worse. I used to organise a fun day for the kids and stuff—a football five-a-side, a bouncy castle, candyfloss, food and so on. It was just a day for the kids, so that they could have something to do during the summer holidays. I have been helping other young people with passport applications, finding jobs—I do what I can, really.

Q341 **Chair:** Whether it be the stuff that Project Future does, or other things that might be happening in your community, what do you think are the most effective things that can help prevent people from getting caught up in serious violence, and prevent knife crime and so on? What things do you think are most effective?

RN: I think it is boredom. For me as a teenager, and for most of the kids that I see out there now, there is nothing to do. There is only one Project Future—it is not like there are 10 of them, so that if someone lives in one area they can go to that one or to another one. There is only one, and not all people might feel safe going there, because of conflicts they might have, and stuff like that. There are only two active youth clubs running in [***] that I know of: Project Future and [***]. Those are the only two



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places, so people have nothing to do at all—they just stand around, and when they get bored, they start getting into trouble. I think they need way more things to do, like apprenticeships and stuff like that.

SC: I would say a similar thing; it is lack of opportunity. When I was young, I got into football and whatnot when I was still in school, but when that was over, I used to get involved in the negative stuff as well. It is lack of opportunity, environmental influences, coming from a broken home, maybe—all-round things.

Q342 **Chair:** What do you think is causing the increase that we have seen? Obviously we have seen more people getting involved in violence, with more stabbings and problems getting worse. What do you think is behind that?

SC: I don't know how it is arising.

RN: In my opinion—just going on what I see from people I know and stuff like that—when I hear professional people say that it is about drill music and UK rap music, it really annoys me. Before drill music came out, this stuff was still happening, but it has just escalated a bit more. Yes, it is getting glorified on YouTube, certain YouTube channels are making people watch it and the young kids are listening to it and following what they are listening to in the music, but I can't specifically say, "This is the cause," because no one knows—this is what we are trying to find out now. You wouldn't really know what we would know, but his reason for carrying a knife will be different from theirs. It is about getting down to the root of it, but it all starts at home—for me, anyway.

Chair: Do you think?

RN: Yeah, parents-wise as well. When I was young, come 10 or 11 o'clock, my mum was coming to find me. I would be on [***], chilling with all my friends, and my mum would pull up, jump out of the car and drag me in the car. With a lot of parents these days, the way their relationship is with their kids, they are not listening. The mums give up and just let the kids do what they are doing. The only time they probably hear from them is if they have been arrested or are in a situation, or if they bump into them. They can live in a house together but not see each other.

Q343 **Chair:** How young do you think kids are when problems start to build up?

RN: It is getting worse now. I am [***], and for my generation it would be when we got to 16 or 17, but like the film said, most of the friends who people would say I was in a gang with were literally next-door neighbours—people I have grown up with. But it is getting younger: 11-year-olds, 10-year-olds.

For me, like I was saying to Fatima, on some of the stuff at Project Future, you need to start tackling the kids from year 6 as they are leaving primary. You need to be on to the ones who are leaving primary, because they are the next generation now. You are still considered a child while you are in primary, but once you get to secondary, we all know that you



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think you are that bit older and you know a bit more. If someone talked to them from year 6 or year 7, it could make a little change—I am not saying it would change the world, but you could have people go into schools and talk to kids about their experiences. As much as they think this knife stuff is cool, when a lot of them hear “prison”, “Crown court” and “police”, those are all red words that they don’t want to hear. I am not saying to build a fear in them, but you could put a little fear in them of prison and stuff like that.

Q344 **Chair:** [***], what do you think?

SC: I have seen a lot of people get involved straight after they got kicked out of school, or when they stopped playing football or doing things that they like. Again, it is lack of opportunity. If you get people involved in things that they enjoy, it might steer them away, but as soon as they are out of that, it is in their face. It is too easy to get into—it is the easy option.

John Woodcock: I thought there was a really interesting line towards the start of the film. The person who was talking had football taken away—as a punishment, I imagine. Actually, that just made things spiral downwards. It was really interesting.

Q345 **Tim Loughton:** About 10 years ago I did a documentary programme with Channel 4 where certain MPs, including me, went to live in a tower block, in my case in the middle of Birmingham in a really high knife crime area, where you had all the postcode gangs. Through a charity there, mostly run by people who had been in gangs and been to prison—who had done all that themselves—I got to meet quite a lot of the gang members. I recognise how you saw kids in the playground at primary school, and they were the embryonic gangs that then went on to be real gangs, so tackling it early is really important.

One thing they made me do was record a rap song, which I thought was really good, but they left out the backing music when they put it on the telly, so it sounded excruciating. That project was really good. There were two things they did: they had some really smart recording studios where a lot of those kids came in and did some really talented stuff that made me look a complete prat. Then they recorded some stuff; they were selling some stuff; and they had a football league, too. I organised a big football match between them and the police. The police got slaughtered; it was quite a good match in the end, with a barbecue afterwards.

One of the interesting things out of that film—it was really powerful—was when the teacher said, “See you in jail.” Just reading all this back, where does it go wrong? Where do the people who end up in those situations feel let down? Is it at school? [***], you mentioned parents as well. At what stage do people think, “Sod that. Nobody’s helping me, so I’m going to look for alternative membership of a group of people, or whatever”? Where can we have the most impact by getting people to think differently?



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RN: For me, school. Back in my day, you would get excluded for nonsense—excluded or sent to the exclusion room. You don't want to be in the exclusion room. Sometimes you would be in the exclusion room by yourself. To me, that is a different type of mental abuse, because you are sitting in a room by yourself; all your friends are still in the classroom. The teacher says you are disruptive; we get that. Send me out of the classroom for 10 minutes.

When you get excluded, you are at home and you're bored. Mum's gone to work. The rest of your brothers and sisters are at work. What are you going to do with yourself? You want to get up to stuff. So you go out and see what you can do. You might meet someone else who's been excluded. He's not up to anything. "Alright, cool, let's go down the road. Let's see what we can do." And that is how it starts.

Q346 **Tim Loughton:** Did you have any teachers who actually took the trouble to try and understand you and have empathy with you, rather than those who wrote you off from the moment you came in the door because "Oh, you're from that area," or background, or whatever?

RN: I think the key for my school was that we had mentors. These were people from outside who used to come into the school. They would allocate them, let's say, two disruptive kids. "He's got two, he's dealing with two." You would see them once every two days. They would sit down with you and ask you what your issues are: "Have you got any issues in school, at home?" They write all this down, and it's just a bit more support for pupils who are disruptive and are going down that road.

For me, it made a difference, even though I didn't fully engage with them at the time—but if I could go back, I would. My friend who did engage with them, his life is completely different to mine. He went left, I went right, and it shows. For me, if you put mentors, people who have lived it—you don't want to be sitting down in front of someone who is telling you something that they don't know nothing about, or that they just read about it.

Q347 **Tim Loughton:** So those mentors need to be youth workers, or perhaps people who have been through the experience that you have been through, though older, rather than just a geography teacher or whatever.

RN: Or the maths teacher, or the PE teacher who hasn't got anything to do for these lessons, so they have sent them to do that. You have to relate to them; it has to be someone you can relate to. I couldn't just sit down in front of someone who is telling me, "[***], you're being bad; you're doing this, you're doing that," if this person is living a whole different lifestyle to how I live. "You ain't asked me why I've been bad." That is what the mentors used to do—ask if you're in trouble, in the sense of "Do you owe money?", "Have you eaten today?". Little things like that. Little questions like that go a very long way.

Q348 **Tim Loughton:** [***], what about you? As that film went on and he got involved in crime, you can see that people feel excluded and get put in classes with other kids who are excluded, and they feed off each other.



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Then they get up to mischief or whatever, and at some stage it turns to crime, because if you haven't got any money, you're a dead man walking, or whatever the phrase was. Is it just a seamless progression to crime, or is it a big thing? Does it become criminal, rather than just a slightly rowdy thing? How does that progress? Do you get where I'm coming from?

SC: No.

Tim Loughton: If you got involved in a gang at an early age and got excluded from school, a step up from that is getting involved in crime. Is that a big deal, or just a natural extension?

SC: I stayed in school, but I have a lot of friends who got excluded quite early. They were put in a young college group or referral unit, I think it's called. From there, it is like a competition for who could be the baddest at school. That's where it comes from, and where it becomes so effective.

Q349 **John Woodcock:** It is interesting what you say about school exclusion. A lot of us are looking at this from the outside, and you can understand that if you are the teacher, and you are responsible for these 30-odd kids, you think, "I'll just take this out," but it sounds like that approach of taking you outside of your peer group is a really big problem and can send you into a really bad pattern.

RN: It plays with your brain, because you question yourself. "Am I really that bad?" You start answering yourself, "All right. If they think I am really that bad, I'm going to show them I'm that bad." Because when you are a child and someone keeps telling you that you are doing something when you are not doing it, you are going to want to do it.

Q350 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Can I ask a question about gangs? This is probably a naive question, but what is it about gangs that is attractive, and why do people join them?

RN: I don't believe everyone is in a gang. Like the film said, it starts off with a group of friends—literally, one, two, three or four. You lot all live side by side. You share the same communal garden bit, play football together, go to the same school, and slowly you will bring a friend from a different area, and you have a friend from a different area, and then they never leave. Next thing you know, there are 50 or 60 people there on a Friday night, but you only really know, say, 15. That's his friend, his friend, and his friend.

Q351 **John Woodcock:** But those 50 or 60, are they in a defined group, so that if there is a problem with another group of 10, 20, 50 or 60, then it's that group against this group? No? It doesn't work like that? Because that is the way that we hear about it.

RN: It doesn't work like that. You can be literally hanging out. Some people go to the pub to meet their friends. That is how it will start. It will be us two sitting down having a chat, and another of our friends will come. Then you'll be having a chat, and you call him and another one comes.



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That's how it is. It is never 50 or 60 just sitting there, do you know what I'm saying?

Q352 John Woodcock: You were talking about Project Future, and saying that it could be complicated, because you had to make sure that you didn't run into people you had a problem with. Those problems with others that people end up with, is it often individuals and their mates?

RN: A [***] boy won't go to a [***] youth club and just socialise there and stuff like that.

Q353 John Woodcock: Because he'd be singled out.

RN: Yes, because he'd be singled out—number one, because of where he is from and stuff like that. This is what it is, isn't it? If that makes sense.

Q354 John Woodcock: It does, absolutely. We are trying to understand something that is often outside our experience zone. That is clearly one of the problems with Parliament.

Dr Stringer: That's it. Especially in recent years, what we have seen is that it is as simple as being from an area. That young person might not affiliate themselves with any gang at all, but just the fact that they have grown up in an area is enough for them to be seen as a target by another area.

Dr Bhandari: When we first started, our young people had not gone out of their postcode, because it was too dangerous as on their doorstep there are rival gangs. We use relational security, and accompany them even when just giving them a fun experience, like taking them to the London Dungeons. We sometimes give them experiences of fun but we would do it with the staff accompanying them. We travel in cabs, because postcodes are vital in terms of a gang area.

Dr Gore: I agree with [***]. As an outsider, when I came in, I realised how complex it is, and some stuff is so individualised—it is not [***] versus [***]; there can be factions within [***]. People think it automatically links to drug-dealing, but even that is so complex. It is not as straightforward as, "You come from [***], so you probably have issues with certain postcodes." One individual can have an issue with a place where someone else can go.

Q355 John Woodcock: I am sorry to be asking such basic questions. Barrow-in-Furness is a town of 70,000 people where everybody knows everybody, and it is 99.4% white British. It is a very different experience. Have you seen any projects breaking down those postcode rivalries?

RN: We've done it.

John Woodcock: That's what this is doing?

RN: In the sense that the funding we got in 2016 was for kids from everywhere. There was no, "If you're from so-and-so, then you can't come." It was for everyone. We put posters everywhere; "It is a community event, and if you want to come, come." A lot of people came.



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Dr Gore: We were told this year, when we set up a project—[***] we were told that we could never work with [***] and [***], so we worked more with [***], because that is more where we are located. The next thing we knew, there were loads of people from [***] in the projects. We were all, “Hang on a minute.” We asked the guys if it was okay, and they said it was. It does not work as strictly as that.

Dr Bhandari: We are recently commissioned—in terms of our replication of the model—to provide early intervention in the liaison and diversion services. This could be any person coming out of prison, or people in police custody cells - young people from anywhere. We have been commissioned based on this model. We are expanding as a hub and spoke model, not in Project Future itself. Some of our young people might provide intelligence and understanding in setting up this project. We are just starting to set it up commissioned by NHS England. We are part-funded by them, as well as through multiple streams, including the Big Lottery Fund, Comic Relief and Public Health England. This allows innovation given that there are such severe cuts in statutory services.

Going back to education, there are severe cuts in the education system too. There is a lack of open thinking spaces for these children. In addition to peer mentors, the more affluent schools would have a psychologist to go in and deal with mental health difficulties, anxiety, depression, learning difficulties and emotional dysregulation. It would be useful to have psychological thinking spaces for young people to go to, alongside peer work, especially after school. Given the cuts in education, this has affected provision of after-school clubs for young people in their areas.

Dr Stringer: [***] and I ran some focus groups in the local primary schools. It was clear that from years 5 and 6, young people were already feeling over-exposed to threats in the environment, and were crying out for spaces to think that through, and talk to each other, to staff and to psychologists about those experiences and how to manage their peers.

Dr Gore: One thing we have definitely discovered from doing Project Future, from investigating earlier intervention stuff and from running the project on the ground is that having a mix of the mental health approach and people with lived experience gives you the best of both worlds in a lot of ways. We would not exist if it weren't for working alongside young people—no one would come to our project.

At the same time, it's helpful to have people with mental health skills, who can work with the complexity that some young people present with, and who are able to think psychologically about why a person might be struggling to engage or to access services, or might be presenting in a certain way. We also have in our project youth workers who have lived experience of the issues. Some young people would much rather seek help from them, whereas some of our young people would much rather come to, say, me, Hannah, Suchi or Fatima. What works for one person does not always work for another, so if you can offer something that has lots of different prongs to it—a multidisciplinary team, really—



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Q356 Douglas Ross: Can I ask a question on the referral side of things? You hear about Project Future from friends who have been there. I'm not saying what the right answer is, because I really don't know. Are the people who ultimately listen to their friends, and who go along to Project Future, the ones who want to be helped away from a gang culture, and are there others whom no people in Project Future can help—who just don't want to go down that route? Or do you think that everyone has an open mind and would want eventually to come along to Project Future?

SC: If you're asking whether there are some people who don't want help and some people who do, I don't think it's like that. I think that after a certain age, you come to a certain realisation; everyone wants to change, because down that route is just pure negativity.

Q357 Douglas Ross: So you don't think there is even a small number who would never want to go along?

SC: No.

RN: But if there is, they don't really come to the project like that. We don't see them, anyway.

SC: Everyone just needs that help in the right way.

Q358 Douglas Ross: I want to ask a couple of things arising from the video. It was the first time I had heard this, and I wonder whether it's correct, and whether you have any awareness of it. It was said that stabbings can happen from a young age, and the quote that I remember was, "The stabbings get worse as you get older." Is that genuine? Is it the case that a 10 or 11-year-old could be stabbed in such a way that even though it is obviously a stabbing, it may not be life-threatening, but as you get older, people think, "Well, this isn't a 10-year-old; you're now a 15-year-old, so we'll stab you in a different or a more severe way"? I am not saying you have any experience of that, but are you aware of it? That was a comment that came through in the video.

RN: I'm trying to think of the best way to answer that. There's not a specific way of stabbing someone. When people do get stabbed, you can't really say, "Oh yeah, we'll just stab him to not kill him," because if you stab someone anywhere, in their leg or their arm, and you touch a vital artery, they can die. So I personally don't understand that statement 100%, but what I get from it is that it could be that play-fights turned into a little poke, and then the older you get, the more serious stuff gets, because you get deeper into the gang stuff and the people that you're coming across now are getting more serious, as in they aren't kids any more. They might be the same age as you, but these are very violent young men. You gotta do what you gotta do, and he's gonna do what he's gotta do. So yes, the older you get, the more you get incidents, and they do get worse.

Q359 Douglas Ross: I am interested in football, and at the start of the video there was mention of sport, and you have both mentioned sport.

John Woodcock: When he says he's interested in football, he means he's



a professional referee.

Douglas Ross: I wasn't going to annoy you so much by saying that, but anyway, I have an interest in sport; it was mentioned right at the start of the video, and you have both mentioned it as one of the first things you said. What more do you think we can do with sport to help, and what at the moment is prohibiting sport from being used as a tool to benefit people?

SC: We need more engagement, more ways for people to pursue a career—

Q360 **Douglas Ross:** In sport?

SC: Yes, whether it's actually being an athlete, a referee or a coach, or working in sports development—all those things. It just needs change. People need to be aware of the pathways to getting into these things, because not many people are aware. Either you get scouted to be an athlete, or you go to uni or something to work in sports development, or you get badges to be a coach. There might be other ways, but we might not know about them.

Q361 **Douglas Ross:** Do you think sport would be the one thing that the vast majority of you have in common as an interest? We all have different interests, but sport seems to be the thing.

RN: It brings people together. One of the biggest things is that we are from [***] north London. [***] as a football team for your community should be having open days for trials for the kids. Put a cap on the age—say, under 16s, or between 10 and 16. I am not saying open the whole stadium for them, but have a little slot for them.

Douglas Ross: It works against itself, because it [***].

RN: It's a tease.

Dr Bhandari: There's a [***] in the midst of abject poverty. The juxtaposition is quite stark.

Q362 **John Woodcock:** You don't get to work with the club at all?

Dr Bhandari: No. We have tried to get in. I think it's unfair. [***]. We have tried and we are not able to.

Dr Gore: [***] offer stuff in the local area, but the issue we have found is that they do a lot of great work in the community, but it is for certain young people. Often, the young people who come to Project Future really struggle to engage with the support that they offer. It is not delivered in a way that can continually engage young people. We will often find that when young people first engage, they might come to the project really ad hoc, but because of the way our model is, we can really persevere, whereas something like the [***] does not have the ability to do that.

The conversations I have had with young people about sport are really interesting. Some have said that it is selling a dream—"We cannot all be



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footballers, but I was on that pathway, and then it all fell apart and I was left with nothing.” Some of the ideas that young people have had about that are interesting—things about integrating literature and numeracy into the sports programme. [***] was talking about alternative careers you can have in sport, not just being the footballer. It is really important somehow to interweave education into that.

One of the biggest obstacles to our young people who really want to get on to things such as apprenticeships is that they cannot because they do not have their basic literacy and numeracy. The way the courses are offered in the college is really inaccessible. These young men have had very difficult relationships with education, so the idea of sitting in a classroom, and going back to the experiences they had in school, is very difficult, but there is no alternative.

Q363 Tim Loughton: I have seen classes for kids who might otherwise be in PRUs held in football stadiums, run by a club’s community project. They incorporate sports, so they are out there, doing all the stuff you mentioned, [***]—meeting the players and all that—and then they do some serious literacy and numeracy as well. They combine education with an environment that they are very excited to be in. They want to be there.

Dr Gore: It is about the classroom-based thing, because some young people will always be inaccessible. Lots of young people have unmet attention needs and emotional stuff going on. By virtue of sitting in a classroom, they do not engage with what is being offered.

SC: Going back to what you asked, when I was younger and trying to get into football, being from [***], there were very few football teams: [***]. But if you go to Enfield, there are loads of teams. They had a few different leagues of their own teams in the borough. That is another reason why people are not getting to that stuff.

Going back to what Lucy said about apprenticeships, I am in uni now, but when I was signing up for uni, I didn’t want to go; I wanted to get into an apprenticeship. I have maths and English GCSE, but I still couldn’t get in. people around me are looking at me not getting in and they think, “Forget it.”

Dr Bhandari: It is thinking much more broadly about what kind of careers are available for young people. Sports and music are an interest for lots of young people, but it is much wider than that, as it would be with any group of young people. We have young people who are interested in baking and cooking, and accountancy—not necessarily the stereotypical things that you might expect, but really broadening out their—

Dr Gore: And often there are careers that people have not even considered as an option for them.

Dr Bhandari: One of our most popular activities in the project is—guess!—cooking. It is just such a popular activity. Through that, we focus on healthy living. Thinking about Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, food—hot



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food—is quite important. One of our young people is a fantastic baker. He is in the process of setting up his own bakery and setting up his business. We call in professional caterers to help them to learn to cook, and we have projects about daily living skills. I can give you all the handouts later to give you an idea about what sorts of activities we have within the project.

Q364 John Woodcock: The video talked about how you found that, in Project Future, you can be accepted and get on and do stuff. I wonder if there are still areas that, because you came out of prison with a record, you feel are closed off to you, and where it would be helpful if people took a bit more of an open-minded attitude. Or do you find that you are getting on okay?

RN: So as in, me coming out of prison—

John Woodcock: In areas where there is stigma, you can see a lot of, “Oh well, he’s come out of prison. We don’t want to go near him”, but you have found that Project Future clearly does not act like that. Are there areas where you have said, “Look, I could really do with getting on in this area—I’d like to go into this”, but there are still barriers there that people like us can look at, to try to change attitudes?

RN: You just need a link, basically. There needs to be a link there. Take Project Future; now that we have sat down with you lot like this, it doesn’t make sense if we never speak to or see each other again. Do you get it? We can give you all the information you need; you take it to your Committee, and you lot do whatever you do with it; and then we want to see progress from it. If we keep the communication, for us, as we step out of [***], that is what you’re talking about basically.

John Woodcock: That is the responsibility that we have. Understood.

Dr Gore: I think you were interested in barriers to people with criminal records—whether, with a criminal record, you cannot get to certain jobs or things.

SC: I hear a lot of people, in these sorts of debates, say that prison sentences need to be a bit harsher and rise, but prison is not really rehabilitative. The courses they give are level 1 courses. With that knowledge, or with that on paper, you’re going to look at the person and think, “You’re not capable of this job.” That needs to be changed.

Q365 Tim Loughton: The \$64,000 question for each of you two: if you were Prime Minister for a day—in the current climate, that is perfectly feasible—what would you do? What are your big ideas that would actually make a difference?

RN: Put in more funding. One thing I’d do is sign some money off for more youth clubs. As clichéd as it sounds, there ain’t none—literally. Like I’ve explained, there are only two that I know of that young kids can go to in my bit of [***], full stop. I do not know any youth clubs in [***]. That would be one of them.



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More apprenticeships, and just investing in the younger generation, man. I'm not saying that all generations are a lost cause, but it's the future that you need to tackle—the ones coming up. As we see, the generations are getting worse and worse, so you put a cap on it. At the ages I said—year 6 and onwards—your brain starts changing, because you're going to a new school and you are going to meet new friends. You might want to do what he wants to do. That is when you are kind of getting to know yourself more, and finding what you want to be in life. For me, that's definitely one of them.

Q366 **Tim Loughton:** Prime Minister [***]?

SC: I'd probably have a project like Project Future in each of the areas that need it. I'd probably advise more people to get into businesses—maybe set up some education for people to know about businesses. We need more apprenticeships, instead of university because of the debt that comes with it, and more opportunities.

Q367 **Tim Loughton:** There are some good ideas there. One subject that we have not spoken about is girls. Is this all male? Where do girls and young women come into this in terms of whether they are part of gangs or interact with gangs?

SC: They play a part, but when I was growing up there was only all-girl gangs that I knew of.

Q368 **Tim Loughton:** So what do teenage young women think about gangs?

RN: Some of them find it attractive.

SC: When they are young.

RN: They want to know someone, because people talk about him and stuff like that. Nine out of ten of them don't want to know. You have that small percentage that find themselves in it as well.

Q369 **Tim Loughton:** You hear all these stories about initiation ceremonies, and that girls get sucked into gangs as well, but that is not really happening for you?

RN: Not really in Haringey—more in south London, to be fair.

Dr Bhandari: In our first three years we were set up with big lottery funding and we were tasked with only setting this up with young men. I think there are quite a lot of dynamic risks in getting young women under the same roof. For us as NHS employees, the risk is too high, so we would not have set it up with women. Also, we do not allow very young cohorts to come into the space due to safeguarding, so we provide outreach work for our 11 to 15-year-olds with the Comic Relief funding. Because we are from a statutory sector, we have to constantly assess risk for our young people. The governance is very well thought about in a project like this.

Dr Gore: On the whole—I am sure that you guys are well aware—women tend to get put down the mental health trajectory much more. That is not to say that there are not lots of issues facing young women in



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communities like [***]. But our remit is to think about the criminalisation of young men, which we know is significantly higher than young women. From our perspective, that is what we have always been trying to tackle. Why do young men get caught up in the criminal justice system? There are more mental health services set up, especially in the criminal justice system, to divert women out of the criminal justice system. Why is that not the same for young men? That is one of the things that we have been thinking about a lot over the past four years.

Q370 Stuart C. McDonald: On that note, you spoke earlier about gangs and how they build up, but specifically on knives, at what stage does somebody make a decision that they are going to carry a knife and why? Is it because of fear of other gangs, or because everybody else in their gang is doing it? What are the reasons why somebody decides to carry a knife?

SC: As soon as they feel like they will need it—maybe because they can't fight or something, or because they won't be able to run away. It is easy to access as well.

Q371 Stuart C. McDonald: Easy access, sure. Where do folk get knives from?

RN: Anywhere. The kitchen.

Stuart C. McDonald: It's as easy as that.

RN: Sure.

Q372 Stuart C. McDonald: Will people most often get a knife from the house rather than going to get it themselves, or is it a mixture of both?

RN: Whichever one is quicker. It depends what type of situation you are in.

SC: I've even seen someone use a school compass, and that's available at school, so it's easy access.

Q373 Stuart C. McDonald: The other thing I was going to ask people about is the police. What do you think about how the police go about their relationship with young people in [***]? Is it not good?

SC: No. They like to make it worse.

Q374 Stuart C. McDonald: Why is that? How does that happen? What is it they are doing wrong and what would you want them to change?

SC: I think it is the targeting. Say they don't find anything—to them that is a mission failed. Then they start giving verbal abuse. This gangs matrix thing as well that comes into it. It is easy to get on it, but super hard to get off of it. It's like it sticks with you for life. What can you do?

Q375 Stuart C. McDonald: You're talking about stop and search, in particular?

RN: The silly things they do, as well—they'll just pull up on you and be talking random nonsense to you. As a civil servant, you're meant to be stopping crime. I've not committed any offence, but you stop to talk



rubbish to me and then just drive off—when something else is happening down the road that you could be fixing. They are concentrating on certain areas like [***]—back from when I’ve been young it’s been a drugs-controlled area, they say. If you look at the statistics and see stabbings and shootings in that area, it doesn’t add up. Just being a young black boy, walking along anywhere in that postcode, you’re going to get stopped. Since I’ve come out, I’ve been stopped once. I was going for probation. I’ve got my prison licence on me, but I’ve been stopped. “What are you doing around here?” “I’m going to probation.” “Do you live round here?” “Yes”. So it is all pleasant, until you get your name checked, and then your name comes up and they get all aggressive—with handcuffs. When you’ve got officers—they’re doing too much; they’re not meant to be moving like that. To have a good relationship with police is kind of hard.

Dr Stringer: With cuts to all public health services but particularly police, what we have seen particularly is that the environment becomes a little more reactive.

Q376 **Stuart C. McDonald:** No proactive engagement.

Dr Stringer: Exactly. Everyone is existing in this threat-based environment, which makes interaction with police incredibly difficult. We have some police being quite antagonistic, but then they rely much more on structures like the gangs matrix that [***] was talking about, to try and lead the policing, which has huge challenges. Time and time again the young people have said to us that what is lacking is much more community engagement from policing. All the times that they get to interact with police are quite intense, which does nothing for the relationship with the community.

Dr Gore: It is worrying, because young people who think they are being followed, or who are in really dangerous situations, don’t call the police. We have known of young people in our community who have lost lives; had they felt able to pick up the phone and call the police, they probably would be here today. I don’t think that we as a project necessarily have the answer to that; but the breakdown in the relationship—certainly in [***], and it is replicated in a lot of London—is so, so bad.

The other thing is that it is difficult for young people to even start that initial conversation with police to amend the scenario. If only police were able to come out more and feel more able to get out of their uniforms, and come and visit young people in spaces where they feel safe. When we have been invited, for young people to go, it’s often been that they need to go to the custody suite or police have come in full outfits, and that instantly puts barriers up.

Q377 **Chair:** Going back to some of the earlier discussions, sometimes when we have listened to the Home Office or the police, some of the evidence that they have given us has suggested that the way in which the drugs market is working now, and the way organised gangs work, is what has been fuelling a lot of the increase in violence. Effectively, more people are being recruited by the organised gangs. The implication is that if they



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sorted out that bit of the problem, perhaps a lot of the violence would go away. How much do you think that that is a big factor, and how much do you think it is other things?

RN: In my opinion, the drug-dealing hasn't changed. The only thing that changes is that dealers might be getting younger. The runners are getting younger; but that is just that, as a little kid, you are looking up to older people in your area, with big cars and stuff. You see all that and you want it. So if he does approach you and say, "Drop this bag down the road and I'm going to give you £100", you're going to say yes. It's always been like that, but now, with social media, it's more glorified. You have a 14 or 15-year-old, God knows where in the UK, on FaceTime or Instagram, selling drugs and stuff like that. I think it's more out in the open now.

Q378 **John Woodcock:** So we're finding out about it—

RN: No, we're not just finding out now—it's always been there.

Q379 **John Woodcock:** The police talk about the explosion of what we in here call county lines—though no one really talks about who's involved in it in that way. There is an increasing problem in towns such as mine, where drugs are ferried in, often from London-based drug gangs. Are you not seeing any real change in young people being asked to "go country"?

RN: No. They are just getting younger. That is all it is.

SC: If they were to come from a home where there was more guidance, I do not think that it would happen. Their environment as well—if they were to wake up in the morning and see businessmen going to work and whatnot, they would not get into it. They are waking up and seeing the sorts of people that we are talking about and drug addicts, so it is in our face and easy access, once again.

Q380 **John Woodcock:** So it is not getting worse, but have you known peers who end up getting sent out to God knows where—to Barrow in Furness and other places outside of London—to ferry drugs?

SC: It happens. If they were on the straight and narrow or saw a change earlier, it would not really happen—I really think that they wouldn't be doing that.

RN: Someone who could play for England in the next five years isn't going to go on county lines because they have got options, prospects, future—hope. But a little kid with no hope, whose mum is probably a drug addict, he hasn't got a nice pair of trainers. So, "Here's £100; go take that down the road for me." It's easy like that.

Dr Gore: The lack of safeguards for certain young men is interesting. There is something about them being young boys. There is a lot about sexual exploitation in women, but young men just do not seem to get the same understanding put to them—for example the vulnerabilities of 14-year-old boys who are found in Scotland. I have actually heard them described as "All criminals" and have heard things such as, "We need to get them out the area and make it somebody else's problem."



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There seems to be a lack of consideration that they are a 14-year-old who went missing for over a month and was never reported as such. What does that say about their environment and what could be put in place rather than them being sent to court and put in Feltham Young Offenders' Institution? Why are they not being diverted into mental health services? That is nothing against the services, but I do not think that they are set up in a way that captures these young men early enough—the really vulnerable ones. By that point, they come with quite big criminal records, so there is a picture painted of them and they are seen as antisocial and difficult, rather than as really vulnerable.

Q381 Chair: Thank you so much. This has been a really good discussion. I will ask you a final question. Is there anything that you think we should have asked you, or is there anything you want to tell us that we have not covered? Do you feel like this is really difficult to solve—that it is really hard and nobody really knows what the answers are—or do you feel that actually everybody does know what the answers are, but need to put a bit of effort in to sort it out?

RN: For me, you have just broken it down to exactly what it is. Let's stop with the games and the beating around the bush. Let's get to the root of the problem. That is funding and apprenticeships—they need things to do. Someone who goes to work and has a routine is not going to be out there carrying knives for no reason. Do you know what I'm saying? I don't know, man. The Government need to go in their pockets. We need more funding. Employ mentors to go into school to talk to kids in primary school. The kids are the future. Like they said when they did their march, they are angry and want to be listened. That's from me, anyway.

SC: My personal opinion is that the root of all this is poverty. There has to be rich and poor. If everyone were rich, what would happen? That is the main issue on that side of things—they might not even want to change it.

Q382 Tim Loughton: How did we do? All right?

RN: You lot asked the right questions.

SC: Going back to two questions. You were talking about the mentors. [***] spoke about his mentors in school, but my mentors were within the school, and they were from countries like where my mum is from. They were like aunties and just wanted to see me win. That was effective.

Q383 Tim Loughton: So they were youth workers attached to the school?

SC: No, they were actually teachers, but they were from [***], so they were just like aunties.

Q384 John Woodcock: One of the messages that I will take from this is that the idea of, "Okay, you have had your chance. You have blown it and we are therefore going to punish you and make an example of you" just is not working. It is actually the opposite of what we should be doing.



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RN: Can you please tell the Government to stop blaming it on drill music? It's not that. Tell them that you have spoken to two young black men from [***] and that it's not drill music. Yeah?

John Woodcock: Got it.

Q385 **Chair:** Thank you very much. We really appreciate it. It has been absolutely brilliant. Best of luck with Project Future and the other stuff that you are doing. Did you say that you were studying at the moment, [***]?

SC: Yes.

Chair: Excellent. Good luck with it.